

John Adair to Andrew Jackson, March 20, 1815, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL JOHN ADAIR¹ TO JACKSON.

¹ Commander of the Kentucky militia during the New Orleans campaign.

New Orleans, March 20, 1815.

Major Genl . Jackson , A sense of duty to my Country and to the Corps, with which I immediately served during the late perilous campaign under your command; has induced me to lay before you the following statement of facts which cannot be controverted. Late on the evening of the 7th of Jany. I received an order from the Adjt Genls Office to send 400 Men from Majr Genl Thomas's Division; under a proper Officer, who was directed to march them up the river to the Citty, where he would receive arms for the men; cross the river, and place himself under the command of Genl. Morgan. This Order was given to Coll Davis at 7 Oclock, who immediately marchd the number of men, ordered to the Citty, where about 200 of them were furnished with indifferent arms, the remainder, who could not be armed in any way returned to their Camp.

Coll Davis crossed the river in the Night and reached Genl. Morgans Camp at 4 oclock on the morning of the 8th. He was immediately ordered to march down the river untill he met the Enemy; Attack him and if compelled by numbers to retreat, he was to dispute every inch of ground back to the Genls breast work. This order was executed by Coll Davis in its fullest extent. He met the Enemy at the distance of half or three quarters of a mile from the breast work, and altho deserted by Majr. Arno's command (with whom he was to act) he formed his men in the open field; attacked the Enemy; and fired from 3 to 5 rounds, and

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retreated under a heavy fire, after receiving an order from the Genls aid to do so his men still returning the fire of the Enemy, who pressed him untill he passed the breast works. The above statement is fully proven by the testimony of Majr. Brown, Aid to Genl Morgan; by Majr Tessa of the Louisiana Militia, by Majr Johnston and Doctr Hambleton. No blame, no censure could possibly be attached to the Kentuckians in this affair.

Coll Davis on passing to the rear of the breast work; was again ordered by Genl. Morgan, to form his Corps (now 170 strong) on the right of the Louisiana Militia; who 500 strong and supported by the Artillery, were posted behind a breast work, finished and extending 200 yards out at right angles from the river. Coll Davis's command of 170 men were agreeable to the Genls. order formed or rather stretched along a Ditch from the right of the breast work; occupying a space of 300 yards. In this weak defenceless situation they received the Attack of the Enemy in front, the Kentuckians here again fired from 3 to 7 rounds; (all those whose guns could fire) nor did they retreat untill a part of the Enemys force had turned or passed their right, and were firing on their rear longer resistance must have subjected them to inevitable capture or destruction—for the truth of the facts here stated I refer you to the testimony of Capt. Holt, Capt. Ford and Adj. Stevens, taken before the Court of enquiry; as likewise Coll Caldwell of the Louisiana Militia, who had the ground measured.

On the right of the Kentuckey line, thus scattered along a Ditch, there was still a space of open ground, several hundred yards, undefended by any; where the Enemy might and did pass to their rear. No attempt was made no order given to support the Kentuckians by a detachment from the breast work (where they might have been well spared) for it is in proof that the Enemys line approaching the breast work on the levy were repulsed by our artillery, and fell back nor did the[y] advance again untill the right of our line was turned and the breast work abandoned— thus we find 500 men of the Louisiana Militia, compleatly defended by a breast work in front and supported by several pieces of Artillery defended on the right by the Kentuckey detachment, who altho few in number and badly armed; were left to beat the whole force of the Enemy, or retreat from inevitable

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distraction. To the retreat of this small Corps has been attributed the disgrace of that day—more sir, it has been represented by letters from this place; published in Tennessee and throughout the Union; as the shameful, cowardly flight of a strong detachment of Kentuckians without firing A Gun. This Calumny, false and unfounded as it is, has gained credit abroad from your Excellency's Official communication of the 9th Jany. to the secretary at war. In that you designate the Kentucky troops, with Genl Morgan as a strong detachment, and again say they ingloriously fled, drawing after them the rest of the Troops.

You will not for a moment believe that I can mean any, the slightest reflection on your conduct by thus bringing into view your Official letter. I well know *that* communication, as well, as every other from you was predicated on the reports made from different parts of the Army, under your command; but you will agree with me that those reports were not always well founded and that from Various causes, it was often difficult for you to obtain any report during the day, of the transactions that took place on the night previous. In your letter of the 9th Jany., you say, you received but little additional strength, from the Arrival of the Kentuckians but few of that Detachment being armed, and again in speaking of the morning of the 8th you say the Enemy was repulsed by the troops under Genls. Carrol and Coffy, *and a division of the Kentucky militia*. This taken with other parts of that communication, in which the Kentucky troops are mentioned, has given rise to an opinion in many parts of the Union, that but few of the Kentucky men fought on the lines on the morning of the 8th. Your report, strictly true so far as relates to the arrival of the Kentucky troops, and to their situation on your lines on the 5th and 6th of Jany. not more than 550 of them being armed until the evening of the 7th yet has a tendency to mislead as to their numbers on the 8th.

On the 7th I received from a corps of exempts in the City, between 4 and 500 musketts and Bayonetts, on a loan for three days. With this timely supply we were enabled to bring on the lines on the morning of the 8th fully 1000 men, This Corps, was stationed agreeable to your order some distance in the rear of the breast work; with the sole view that they

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might be led, to the defence of any part of the works, where their services might be most useful and necessary—to this wise order and arrangement was it owing, that 1000 men in addition to the usual defence on the lines, was brought to meet the Enemys strong collusion and to oppose with ranks of from 6 to 8 deep his most daring and desperate attack—to this disposition of the Troops we may in a good degree attribute the unparrelled destruction that took place in the Collumn of the Enemy on that day.

I thus bring to your recollection facts and circumstances, which altho they took place under your own orders, may, in the hurry and confusion of the moment, have escaped your notice, and the more so as no report was called for on the 8th from the officers commanding seperate Corps. The Court of Enquiry ordered to investigate the affair on the west side of the river, have by their report acquitted Coll Davis of all blame or censure, and have said the retreat of they [the] Kentuckians may be excuseable from their position, want of arms. etc. The language Sir in which this oppinion is couched, to which I refer you, is not such as can satisfy the pride of a Soldior, who having done his duty faithfully, has been slandered by those who have been more to blame than himself. At the request of my fellow soldiors from Kentucky, who have had the honor of serving, and we trust of having done their duty, under your command in this last, but most glorious Campaign of the war, I have been induced to make this appeal to your Justice, for a more explicit approval of their conduct, and if the[y] are entitled to it, for such a one as will enable them to meet their fellow soldiors in Kentucky without a blush. Finding after the retreat of the Enemy, that you had much still to occupy and perplex you, I purposely delayed this application untill you might have leisure to attend to it. I am Sir

with the highest sentiments of respect and esteem